

already taking notes on *Don Quixote* (which was in his maturity to seem to him 'the book of books') and announce a set of plays, among them one, 'Antiquaire ignorant, qui se moque des antiquaires peut [sic] habiles', in which we may see a first faint foreshadowing of the floundering researches, fifty years afterwards, of Bouvard and Pecuchet.

Eighteen months later, at eleven, this strange child is writing: 'Louis-Philippe est maintenant avec sa famille dans la ville qui vit naître Corneille . . . Courir pour un roi, voter 30 mille francs pour les fêtes. . . Ah!!! quelle monde est bête'; at twelve, 'si je n'avais dans la tête et au bout de ma plume une reine de France au quinzième siècle, je serais totalement dégoûté de la vie et il y aurait longtemps qu'une balle m'aurait délivré de cette plaisanterie bouffonne qu'on appelle la vie'²; at thirteen, je travaille comme un démon, me levant à trois heures et demie du matin'; at sixteen, Vraiment je n'estime profondément que deux hommes, Rabelais et Byron, les deux seuls qui aient écrit dans l'intention de nuire au genre humain et de lui rire à la face'. Here the child in Flaubert is already the man we know—enraged with life, working himself almost to death, and finding consolation for the revoltingness of the present only in his dreams of far away and long ago. Even the precocity of Chatterton, or Macaulay, or Mill, seems naive beside this

boy's rooted
and convinced contempt for human existence
and every-
thing in it except the world of the
imagination.

And yet, stranger still, he had been in
earlier childhood
peculiarly simple and backward .in some
ways: crying
because he could not learn to read until he
was nine;
dreaming for long hours, like a natural, with
his finger in
his mouth; and so innocent that an old
servant of the

²Quoted in THbaudet, *Flaubert*.